

performed by hospital-based physicians.) However, when services are furnished more than 12 months before the beginning of the fee screen year (January 1 through December 30) in which a request for payment is made, payment is based on the customary and prevailing charge screens in effect for the fee screen year that ends immediately preceding the fee screen year in which the claim or request for payment is made.

(d) Payment under Medicare Part B for durable medical equipment and prosthetic and orthotic devices is determined in accordance with the provisions of subpart D of part 414 of this chapter.

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**§ 405.502 Criteria for determining reasonable charges.**

(a) Criteria. The law allows for flexibility in the determination of reasonable charges to accommodate reimbursement to the various ways in which health services are furnished and charged for. The criteria for determining what charges are reasonable include:

(1) The customary charges for similar services generally made by the physician or other person furnishing such services.

(2) The prevailing charges in the locality for similar services.

(3) In the case of physicians' services, the prevailing charges adjusted to reflect economic changes as provided under § 405.504 of this subpart.

(4) In the case of medical services, supplies, and equipment that are reimbursed on a reasonable charge basis (excluding physicians' services), the inflation-indexed charge as determined under § 405.509.

(5) [Reserved]

(6) In the case of medical services, supplies, and equipment (including equipment servicing) that the Secretary judges do not generally vary significantly in quality from one supplier to another, the lowest charge levels at which such services, supplies, and

equipment are widely and consistently available in a locality.

(7) Other factors that may be found necessary and appropriate with respect to a category of service to use in judging whether the charge is inherently reasonable. This includes special reasonable charge limits (which may be either upper or lower limits) established by HCFA or a carrier if it determines that the standard rules for calculating reasonable charges set forth in this subpart result in the grossly deficient or excessive charges. The determination of these limits is described in paragraphs (g) and (h) of this section.

(8) In the case of laboratory services billed by a physician but performed by an outside laboratory, the payment levels established in accordance with the criteria stated in § 405.515.

(9) Except as provided in paragraph (a)(10) of this section, in the case of services of assistants-at-surgery as defined in § 405.580 in teaching and non-teaching settings, charges that are not more than 16 percent of the prevailing charge in the locality, adjusted by the economic index, for the surgical procedure performed by the primary surgeon. Payment is prohibited for the services of an assistant-at-surgery in surgical procedures for which HCFA has determined that assistants-at-surgery on average are used in less than 5 percent of such procedures nationally.

(10) In the case of services of assistants at surgery that meet the exception under § 415.190(c)(2) or (c)(3) of this chapter because the physician is performing a unique, necessary, specialized medical service in the total care of a patient during surgery, reasonable charges consistent with prevailing practice in the carrier's service area rather than the special assistant at surgery rate.

(b) *Comparable services limitation.* The law also specifies that the reasonable charge cannot be higher than the charge applicable for a comparable service under comparable circumstances to the carriers' own policyholders and subscribers.

(c) *Application of criteria.* In applying these criteria, the carriers are to exercise judgment based on factual data on the charges made by physicians to patients generally and by other persons

to the public in general and on special factors that may exist in individual cases so that determinations of reasonable charge are realistic and equitable.

(d) *Responsibility of Administration and carriers.* Determinations by carriers of reasonable charge are not reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Health Care Financing Administration, although the general procedures and performance of functions by carriers are evaluated. In making determinations, carriers apply the provisions of the law under broad principles issued by the Health Care Financing Administration. These principles are intended to assure overall consistency among carriers in their determinations of reasonable charge. The principles in §§ 405.503 through 405.507 establish the criteria for making such determinations in accordance with the statutory provisions.

(e) *Determination of reasonable charges under the End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) Program—(1) General.* Reasonable charges for renal-related items and services (furnished in connection with transplantation or dialysis) must be related to costs and allowances that are reasonable when the treatments are furnished in an effective and economical manner.

(2) *Nonprovider (independent) dialysis facilities.* Reasonable charges for renal-related items and services furnished before August 1, 1983 must be determined related to costs and charges prior to July, 1973, in accordance with the regulations at § 405.541. Items and services related to outpatient maintenance dialysis that are furnished after that date are paid for in accordance with §§ 405.544 and 413.170 of this chapter.

(3) *Provider services and (hospital-based) dialysis facilities.* Renal-related items and services furnished by providers, or by ESRD facilities based in hospitals, before August 1, 1983 are paid for under the provider reimbursement provisions found generally in part 413 of this chapter. Items and services related to outpatient maintenance dialysis that are furnished after that date are paid for in accordance with §§ 405.544 and 413.170 of this chapter.

(4) *Physicians' services.* Reasonable charges for renal-related physicians' services must be determined consid-

ering charges made for other services involving comparable physicians' time and skill requirements, in accordance with regulations at §§ 405.542 and 405.543.

(5) *Health maintenance organizations (HMOs).* For special rules concerning the reimbursement of ESRD services furnished by risk-basis HMOs, or by facilities owned or operated by or related to such HMOs by common ownership or control, see §§ 405.2042(b)(14) and 405.2050(c).

(f) *Determining payments for certain physician services furnished in outpatient hospital settings—(1) General rule.* If physician services of the type routinely furnished in physicians' offices are furnished in outpatient hospital settings before January 1, 1992, carriers determine the reasonable charge for those services by applying the limits described in paragraph (f)(5) of this section.

(2) *Definition.* As used in this paragraph (f), *outpatient settings* means—

(i) Hospital outpatient departments, including clinics and emergency rooms; and

(ii) Comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facilities.

(3) *Services covered by limits.* The carrier establishes a list of services routinely furnished in physicians' offices in the area. The carrier has the discretion to determine which professional services are routinely furnished in physicians' offices, based on current medical practice in the area. Listed below are some examples of routine services furnished by office-based physicians.

#### Examples

Review of recent history, determination of blood pressure, auscultation of heart and lungs, and adjustment of medication.

Brief history and examination, and initiation of diagnostic and treatment programs.

Treatment of an acute respiratory infection.

(4) *Services excluded from limits.* The limits established under this paragraph do not apply to the following:

(i) Rural health clinic services.

(ii) Surgical services included on the ambulatory surgical center list of procedures published under § 416.65(c) of this chapter.

(iii) Services furnished in a hospital emergency room after the sudden onset of a medical condition manifesting itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in—

(A) Placing the patient's health in serious jeopardy;

(B) Serious impairment to bodily functions; or

(C) Serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

(iv) Anesthesiology services and diagnostic and therapeutic radiology services.

(v) Federally qualified health center services paid under the rules in part 405 subpart X.

(5) *Methodology for developing limits—*

(i) *Development of a charge base.* The carrier establishes a charge base for each service identified as a routine office-based physician service. The charge base consists of the prevailing charge in the locality for each such service adjusted by the economic index. The carrier uses the prevailing charges that apply to services by non-specialists in office practices in the locality in which the outpatient setting is located.

(ii) *Calculation of the outpatient limits.* The carrier calculates the charge limit for each service by multiplying the charge base amount for each service by .60.

(6) *Application of limits.* The reasonable charge for physician services of the type described in paragraph (f)(3) of this section that are furnished in an outpatient setting is the lowest of the actual charges, the customary charges in accordance with § 405.503, the prevailing charges applicable to these services in accordance with § 405.504, or the charge limits calculated in paragraph (f)(5)(ii) of this section.

(g) *Determination of payment amounts in special circumstances—*(1) *General.* (i) For purposes of this paragraph, a "category of items or services" may consist of a single item or service or any number of items or services.

(ii) HCFA or a carrier may determine that the standard rules for calculating Part B payment amounts for a category of items or services identified in

section 1861(s) of the Act (other than physician services paid under section 1848 of the Act) will result in grossly deficient or excessive amounts.

(iii) If HCFA or the carrier determines that the standard rules for calculating payment amounts for a category of items or services set forth in this subpart will result in grossly deficient or excessive amounts, HCFA or the carrier may establish special payment limits that are realistic and equitable for a category of items or services.

(iv) The limit on the payment amount is either an upper limit to correct a grossly excessive payment amount or a lower limit to correct a grossly deficient payment amount.

(v) The limit is either a specific dollar amount or is based on a special method to be used in determining the payment amount.

(vi) Except as provided in paragraph (h) of this section, a payment limit for a given year may not vary by more than 15 percent from the payment amount established for the preceding year.

(vii) *Examples of excessive or deficient payment amounts.* Examples of the factors that may result in grossly deficient or excessive payment amounts include, but are not limited to, the following:

(A) The marketplace is not competitive. This includes circumstances in which the marketplace for a category of items or services is not truly competitive because a limited number of suppliers furnish the item or service.

(B) Medicare and Medicaid are the sole or primary sources of payment for a category of items or services.

(C) The payment amounts for a category of items or services do not reflect changing technology, increased facility with that technology, or changes in acquisition, production, or supplier costs.

(D) The payment amounts for a category of items or services in a particular locality are grossly higher or lower than payment amounts in other comparable localities for the category of items or services, taking into account the relative costs of furnishing the category of items or services in the different localities.

(E) Payment amounts for a category of items or services are grossly higher or lower than acquisition or production costs for the category of items or services.

(F) There have been increases in payment amounts for a category of items or services that cannot be explained by inflation or technology.

(G) The payment amounts for a category of items or services are grossly higher or lower than the payments made for the same category of items or services by other purchasers in the same locality.

(2) *Establishing a limit.* In establishing a payment limit for a category of items or services, HCFA or a carrier considers the available information that is relevant to the category of items or services and establishes a payment amount that is realistic and equitable. The factors HCFA or a carrier consider in establishing a specific dollar amount or special payment method for a category of items or services may include, but are not limited to, the following:

(i) *Price markup.* This is the relationship between the retail and wholesale prices or manufacturer's costs of a category of items or services. If information on a particular category of items or services is not available, HCFA or a carrier may consider the markup on a similar category of items or services and information on general industry pricing trends.

(ii) *Differences in charges.* HCFA or a carrier may consider the differences in charges for a category of items or services made to non-Medicare and Medicare patients or to institutions and other large volume purchasers.

(iii) *Costs.* HCFA or a carrier may consider resources (for example, overhead, time, acquisition costs, production costs, and complexity) required to produce a category of items or services.

(iv) *Utilization.* HCFA or a carrier may impute a reasonable rate of use for a category of items or services and consider unit costs based on efficient utilization.

(v) *Payment amounts in other localities.* HCFA or a carrier may consider payment amounts for a category of items or services furnished in another locality.

(3) *Notification of limits—(i) National limits.* HCFA publishes in the FEDERAL REGISTER proposed and final notices announcing a special payment limit described in this paragraph (g) before it adopts the limit. The notices set forth the criteria and circumstances, if any, under which a carrier may grant an exception to a payment limit for a category of items or services.

(ii) *Carrier-level limits.* A carrier proposing to establish a special payment limit for a category of items or services must inform the affected suppliers and State Medicaid agencies of the factors it considered in determining and in establishing the limit, as described in paragraphs (g)(1) through (g)(3) of this section, and solicit comments. The carrier must evaluate the comments it receives and inform the affected suppliers, State Medicaid agencies, and HCFA of any final limits it establishes. HCFA acknowledges in writing to the carrier that it received the carrier's notification. After the carrier has received HCFA's acknowledgement, the limit may be effective for services furnished at least 30 days after the date of the carrier's notification.

(h) *Special payment limit adjustments greater than 15 percent of the payment amount.* In addition to applying the general rules under paragraphs (g)(1) through (g)(3) of this section, HCFA applies the following rules in determining and establishing a payment adjustment greater than 15 percent of the payment amount for a category of items or services within a year:

(1) *Potential impact of special limit.* HCFA considers the potential impact on quality, access, beneficiary liability, assignment rates, and participation of suppliers.

(2) *Supplier consultation.* Before making a determination that a payment amount for a category of items or services is not inherently reasonable by reason of its grossly excessive or deficient amount, HCFA consults with representatives of the suppliers likely to be affected by the change in the payment amount.

(3) *Publication of national limits.* If HCFA determines under this paragraph (h) to establish a special payment limit for a category of items or services, it publishes in the FEDERAL REGISTER

proposed and final notices of a special payment limit before it adopts the limit. The notice sets forth the criteria and circumstances, if any, under which a carrier may grant an exception to the limit for the category of items or services.

(i) *Proposed notice.* The proposed notice—

(A) Explains the factors and data that HCFA considered in determining that the payment amount for a category of items or services is grossly excessive or deficient;

(B) Specifies the proposed payment amount or methodology to be established with respect to a category of items or services;

(C) Explains the factors and data that HCFA considered in determining the payment amount or methodology, including the economic justification for a uniform fee or payment limit if it is proposed;

(D) Explains the potential impacts of a limit on a category of items or services as described in paragraph (h)(1) of this section; and

(E) Allows no less than 60 days for public comment on the proposed payment limit for the category of items or services.

(ii) *Final notice.* The final notice—

(A) Explains the factors and data that HCFA considered, including the economic justification for any uniform fee or payment limit established; and

(B) Responds to the public comments.

(i) *Paramedic intercept ambulance services.* (1) HCFA establishes its payment allowance on a carrier-wide basis by using the median allowance from all localities within an individual carrier's jurisdiction.

(2) HCFA's payment allowance is equal to the advanced life support rate minus 40 percent of the basic life support rate.

(3) HCFA bases payment on the lower of the actual charge or the amount described in paragraph (i)(1) and (i)(2) of this section.

(Secs. 1102, 1814(b), 1833(a), 1842(b), and (h), and 1871, 1903(i)(1) of the Social Security Act; 49 Stat. 647, as amended, 79 Stat. 296, 302, 310, 331; 86 Stat. 1395, 1454; 42 U.S.C. 1302, 1395u(b), 1395hh, 1396b(i)(1).

[32 FR 12599, Aug. 31, 1967]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 405.502, see the List of CFR Sections Affected in the Finding Aids section of this volume.

#### § 405.503 Determining customary charges.

(a) *Customary charge defined.* The term "customary charges" will refer to the uniform amount which the individual physician or other person charges in the majority of cases for a specific medical procedure or service. In determining such uniform amount, token charges for charity patients and substandard charges for welfare and other low income patients are to be excluded. The reasonable charge cannot, except as provided in § 405.506, be higher than the individual physician's or other person's customary charge. The customary charge for different physicians or other persons may, of course, vary. Payment for covered services would be based on the actual charge for the service when, in a given instance, that charge is less than the amount which the carrier would otherwise have found to be within the limits of acceptable charges for the particular service. Moreover, the income of the individual beneficiary is not to be taken into account by the carrier in determining the amount which is considered to be a reasonable charge for a service rendered to him. There is no provision in the law for a carrier to evaluate the reasonableness of charges in light of an individual beneficiary's economic status.

(b) *Variation of charges.* If the individual physician or other person varies his charges for a specific medical procedure or service, so that no one amount is charged in the majority of cases, it will be necessary for the carrier to exercise judgment in the establishment of a "customary charge" for such physician or other person. In making this judgment, an important guide, to be utilized when a sufficient volume of data on the physician's or other person's charges is available, would be the median or midpoint of his charges, excluding token and substandard charges as well as exceptional charges on the high side. A significant clustering of charges in the vicinity of the median amount might indicate that a point of such clustering should be taken as the physician's or other